Encyclopædia Iranica

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Published: December 15, 1983
Last Updated: May 29, 2018

ADIABENE

ADIABENE, a district near the present-day borders of Iraq, Iran, and Turkey, approximately 36° north latitude and 44° east longitude, bounded on three sides by the Tigris and its tributaries the Greater and Lesser Zāb, while eastwards it extended to Lake Ormīa. It thus corresponded with the heartland of the ancient empire of Assyria. However, after the fall of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, in 612 B.C., the general hatred aroused by its genocidal policies precluded any immediate revival of its name. The Seleucid empire, founded in the aftermath of Alexander's invasion, split many of the relatively unwieldy Achaemenid satrapies into much smaller divisions. These retained the title satrapy and were often characterized by names ending in *–ane* or *–ene*, a practice that continued among all officially Greek-speaking successor states, whether they were indigenously ruled or not. One of these late creations, Adiabene came into prominence with the advent of the Parthians, who dispossessed the Seleucids of their territories first in Iran and subsequently in Mesopotamia. The Arsacids, the ruling dynasty of Parthia, allowed very considerable freedom to their feudatories; the satrap of Adiabene was usually permitted to call himself king and was recognized as such by his contemporaries. He did not exercise the privilege of striking his own coinage, though some of his equals have left evidence of much numismatic activity. Tiny, base metal issues, with no indication of the authority responsible but of the Parthian period and probably used for minor transactions in the market place, have been found on the site of Nineveh, which had perhaps been refounded by the Macedonians as a semi-autonomous Greek city similar to Seleucia on the Tigris (see G. Lekider in *Iranica Antiqua* 7, 1967, p. 4; cf. *Revue*

Numismatique 1962, p. 51). It seems likely, though, that the capital of Adiabene was not Nineveh but Arbela, the modern Erbel, which lies farther east and which gave its name to the last battle between Darius and Alexander.

Because Parthian records were systematically destroyed by the Sasanians, much of our present knowledge of the limits of Adiabene stems from the geographers of contemporary Greece and Rome such as Strabo (11.503, 530; 16.736, 742), Ptolemy (6.1, 2) and Pliny (*Hist. nat.* 5.66; 6.25, 28, 41, 44, 114), who specifically mentions "Armenian Adiabene which was formerly called Assyria." Later Byzantine writers were not unnaturally confused and anachronistically refer, for example, to "Sardanapalus of Adiabene." The most extended historical details are to be found in Josephus (*Antiquities* 20) and Tacitus (*Annales* 12).

The Parthian king, Phraates IV (37-2 B.C.), chose as his successor his last-born son Phraataces and, for the latter's safety sent the older brothers into exile in Rome. In a similar fashion, the ruler of Adiabene, Monobazus, in the first decades of the Christian era intended his heir to be a younger child, Izates (Ezad), but for protection sent the youth away instead to reside with Abinerglos, king of Characene or Mesene (Maišān). The latter gave Izates his daughter Samacha in marriage as well as a country estate. During his stay in Spasinu Charax, Abinerglos' capital, Izates was converted to Judaism by Ananias, (Ḥannan), a Jewish merchant. Meanwhile, at the court of Monobazus, his wife Helena, mother of Izates, also took up the same faith, perhaps by the persuasion of the Jews of neighboring Nisibis (Naṣībīn), led at this time by Rabbi Judah ben Bathyra. The main trade route across upper Mesopotamia ran through Edessa (Urfa), Nisibis and Adiabene, the more southerly one by way of Carrhae (Ḥarrān) being much less frequented because of Bedouin activities; the merchants using these roads and those down to Characene at the head of the Persian Gulf were among the major instruments for the diffusion of culture and religion. Furthermore, the Jews of Adiabene soon became famous for their strict attention to the spirit of the Law, and it was remarked that they always placed a *mezuzah* or Biblical text on the doors of their lodging when they traveled.

Conscious that his end was imminent, Monobazus summoned home Izates and then lodged him in the adjacent countryside. As soon as Monobazus' death was announced, Helena called an assembly of the noblemen, district governors, and army commanders (clearly the equivalent of a senate). They welcomed the deceased king's choice of Izates as the new monarch but, for additional

security, advised the wholesale killing of his brothers and kinsmen. A sound precedent lay in earlier Parthian history, Phraates IV having acted in just this manner when he came to the throne. Somewhat naively, Helena entrusted Monobazus, the elder brother of Izates, with the diadem and insignia of office until Izates could be informed of this recommendation. Disappointing cynical expectation, Monobazus duly surrendered his temporary powers, and Izates was crowned in A.D. 36. Perhaps inspired by his brother's unselfishness or his own religious scruples, Izates also acted with a clemency extraordinary for the age and sent away his relatives as hostages to Rome or Parthia. As further testimony of his acceptance of Judaism he now had himself circumcised; Helena had opposed this, because she feared it would be interpreted by the population of Adiabene as inimical to its own customs. However, she herself was sufficiently in sympathy with him to go in A.D. 46 on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem where she was able to relieve the worst effects of a famine by importing shiploads of grain from Alexandria and figs from Cyprus.

The Parthian tiara was more easily reached for than retained and, at the very beginning of Izates' reign, Artabanus II (Ardavān), the ruling Arsacid, found himself in danger at home. Accordingly, he and his entourage sought refuge in Adiabene. The suppliant was kindly received by Izates, who promised that he would risk his own kingdom in an attempt to restore Artabanus. This was so far successful that Cinnamus, the nominee of the Parthian senate, led the recall of Artabanus, took the diadem from his own brow, and put it on that of his royal rival. Artabanus, naturally grateful for so effectual an intervention, rewarded Izates with the privilege of wearing an upright tiara and of sleeping on a golden couch as well as an extension of territory to include Nisibis on the western side of the Tigris. Artabanus died shortly afterwards, and his son, Vardanes I (Bardān), attempted to persuade Izates to accompany the Parthians in an expedition against the Romans. The prince of Adiabene knew the danger and was reluctant to commit himself, so provoking in turn the anger of Vardanes. However, the latter soon perished during a civil war with his brother Gotarzes II (Gōdarz): Such a providential escape convinced the nobility of the superiority of Izates' religion, and many of them turned to it. The Roman riposte was to dispatch in A.D. 49 a hostage of Arsacid blood, Mithradates (Mehrdād), as a pretender to the throne. This young man dallied too long among the entertainments supplied by king Abgar of Edessa, so that, when the latter passed him on to Izates, the majority of his supporters had already disappeared. Whether with Izates' connivance or not, Gotarzes captured Mithradates and cropped his ears, this disfigurement disbarring him

from any further prospect of the throne. The Adiabenian aristocracy remaining unconverted brought in an Arab chieftan, Abia, to overthrow Izates; when he proved inadequate, they appealed to the new Parthian monarch, Vologases I (Walaš), to appoint as their ruler one of his own family who would observe ancestral practices. Nothing loath, Vologases manufactured a *casus belli* by demanding back the privileges granted by Artabanus to Izates, who thereupon prepared to resist, although he realized the relative weakness of his forces and relied as much on prayers. These were answered with commendable promptitude by an unanticipated invasion of Parthia by nomads, and Vologases' attention was diverted from attack to defense.

Izates' death occurred in A.D. 60, and his mother, Helena, did not long survive him. Both were buried at Jerusalem on the orders of Monobazus, chosen by Izates in preference to one of his own twenty-four sons as the next monarch in recognition of his earlier disinterested help. Probably tempted by the unsettled conditions associated with a new reign, Tigranes, ruler of Armenia, invaded Adiabene in A.D. 61 with the apparent intention of permanent occupation. It seems likely that Tigranes had at least the tacit approval of Nero's general, Corbulo, then in Syria, but the Adiabenian armies themselves received Parthian aid led by Monaeses, who eventually thrust the invaders back to Tigranocerta. An armistice was arranged with concessions on both sides, although, as usual, the Romans represented the affair as a victory for themselves. Forcibly convinced of the necessity for maintaining anti-Roman friendships, Monobazus, also a convert to Judaism, supplied golden handles for all the vessels used on the Day of Atonement in the Temple at Jerusalem. His sympathies were more practically engaged later on, since two of his relatives died in the Jewish ranks fighting valiantly against Vespasian and Titus in the war of A.D. 66-70.

A later writer, Theodoret, mentions Adiabene as "belonging to the Parthians, but now called Osrhoene," and this may imply at some stage a reversion to the status of satrapy as well as an extension of its boundaries beyond Nisibis to Edessa and the Euphrates. On the other hand, in about A.D. 110, the king of Edessa is also said to have purchased his state from the Arsacid, Pacorus II (Pakur), and this means continued separation of the two. In any case, the whole political situation was reduced to chaos by Trajan's invasion of A.D. 114, undertaken in the misguided Roman pursuit of a weak periphery. During his initial campaigning season Trajan descended from Armenia and seized Nisibis,

which was probably still Adiabenian. The local satrap, Mebarsapes, arrested the Roman ambassadors sent by Trajan from winter quarters in Antioch. Next year the invading troops were divided. Part went down the Euphrates, and part, commanded by Trajan, attacked across the Tigris by a bridge of boats. Mebarsapes was defeated, and his satrapy with casual insensitivity was officially renamed Assyria. The Roman pincer movement captured Ctesiphon, and Trajan went on to the Persian Gulf. In his rear the Parthians regrouped and, from their base in Media, swept down on Assyria, killing a Roman general. The emperor returned north, beat off the counterstroke, and imposed an ephemeral client king, Parthamaspates, on Mesopotamia and Assyria. After Trajan's death in A.D. 117, Hadrian adopted a more pacific foreign policy, and the Romans withdrew to the Euphrates frontier again.

Whatever their faults, the Parthians were no bigots. Nominally Zoroastrian, they permitted the cults of the old gods to persist in subordinate lands such as Adiabene. They were equally tolerant towards the establishment of Jewish communities there, and the Jews of Edessa, Nisibis, and Adiabene repaid them by being among the most vigorous opponents of Trajan, a cause for which much of their blood was spilt by the legions. At about this time, also, the first tentative advances of Christianity were under way, first in Edessa and then in Adiabene, where the missionaries are reported to have been Addai and Thaddeus; some doubts arise as to their historicity, because of an uncomfortable doublet: The first exponents of the doctrines of Mani in Adiabene are recorded as Addai and Thomas. However, the new religion certainly gained adherents rapidly among those formerly professing Judaism.

The campaigns of Verus did not impinge upon Adiabene, but during the civil wars between Severus, Albinus, and Niger, the kings of Edessa and Adiabene attacked Nisibis. They later excused themselves to the victorious Severus on the grounds that Nisibis had supported Niger, but to no avail. Severus ordered an invasion in A.D. 195, and as a result the obsequious Senate awarded him the title "Adiabenicus." Twenty years later Caracalla, with even more specious arguments than the Romans habitually employed, attempted to ambush the last Arsacid, Artabanus IV, and, having failed, vented his spleen by scattering the bones of the Parthian's forebears entombed at Arbela. By now Adiabene had a significant Christian population, whose scholars, along with those of Edessa, were responsible for translations into Syriac of the Old and New Testaments. Tatian, born in Adiabene, may have written there before A.D. 172 the famous *Diatessaron*, a composite version of the gospels.

The resurgent Iranian nationalism of the Sasanians overthrew the Arsacids in A.D. 224, but the feudatory dynasties remained loyal to their former masters; the king of Armenia, supported by Caucasian levies and, presumably, the local armies, opposed Ardašīr's advance in Adiabene and Atropatene. As a result of this and of the religious difference, Adiabene was never regarded as an integral part of Iran by the Sasanians, although they exercised continuous control over it and indeed renamed it after Ardašīr (see Naxwardašīragān). When Christianity became the official religion of the Roman empire under Constantine, the position of Adiabenian Christians was naturally exacerbated, since they were seen as potentially disaffected by the zealously Zoroastrian Sasanians. From Byzantium the emperors continued to send troops to the Euphrates frontier, and there was constant friction. An expedition beyond the Tigris resulted in the epithets "Adiabenicus Maximus" for Constantius II in A.D. 354. After the death of Valens, A.D. 378, Armenian influence became paramount in Adiabene, and it was administered by the family of marcher lords, the Artsunis (q.v.); like other feudal barons, they resisted central authority and therefore inclined to the Sasanians. Some relief for the Christian community came with the rise of sectarian disputes. The tax demands on the Byzantine provinces were so oppressive that the Nestorian "heresy," almost because it was unacceptable in Constantinople, grew rife in the east; Arbela became the metropolitan see of the Nestorians in the 7th century. The Sasanians no longer regarded these Christians in the plains of Adiabene as incipient traitors and their lot improved. Finally, with the advent of Islam to the area, Adiabene became Hadyab, and links with its past were submerged.

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